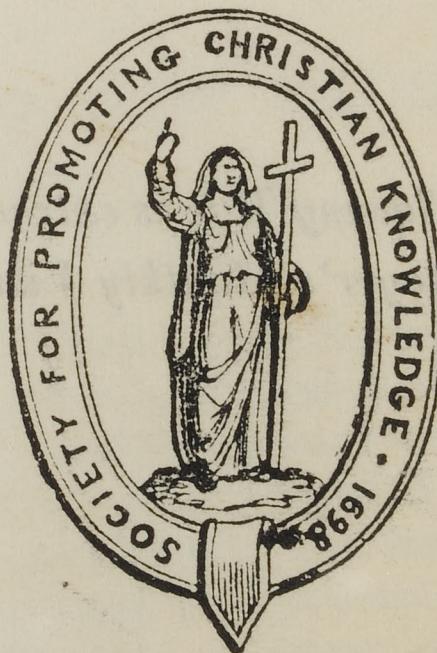


SHORT STORIES
OF
COTTAGERS' DAUGHTERS.



LONDON:
FRANCIS & JOHN RIVINGTON,
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD,
AND WATERLOO PLACE, PALL MALL.

*The following Tale is extracted from
the “Cottager’s Monthly Visitor.”*

Gilbert & Rivington, Printers, St. John’s Square.

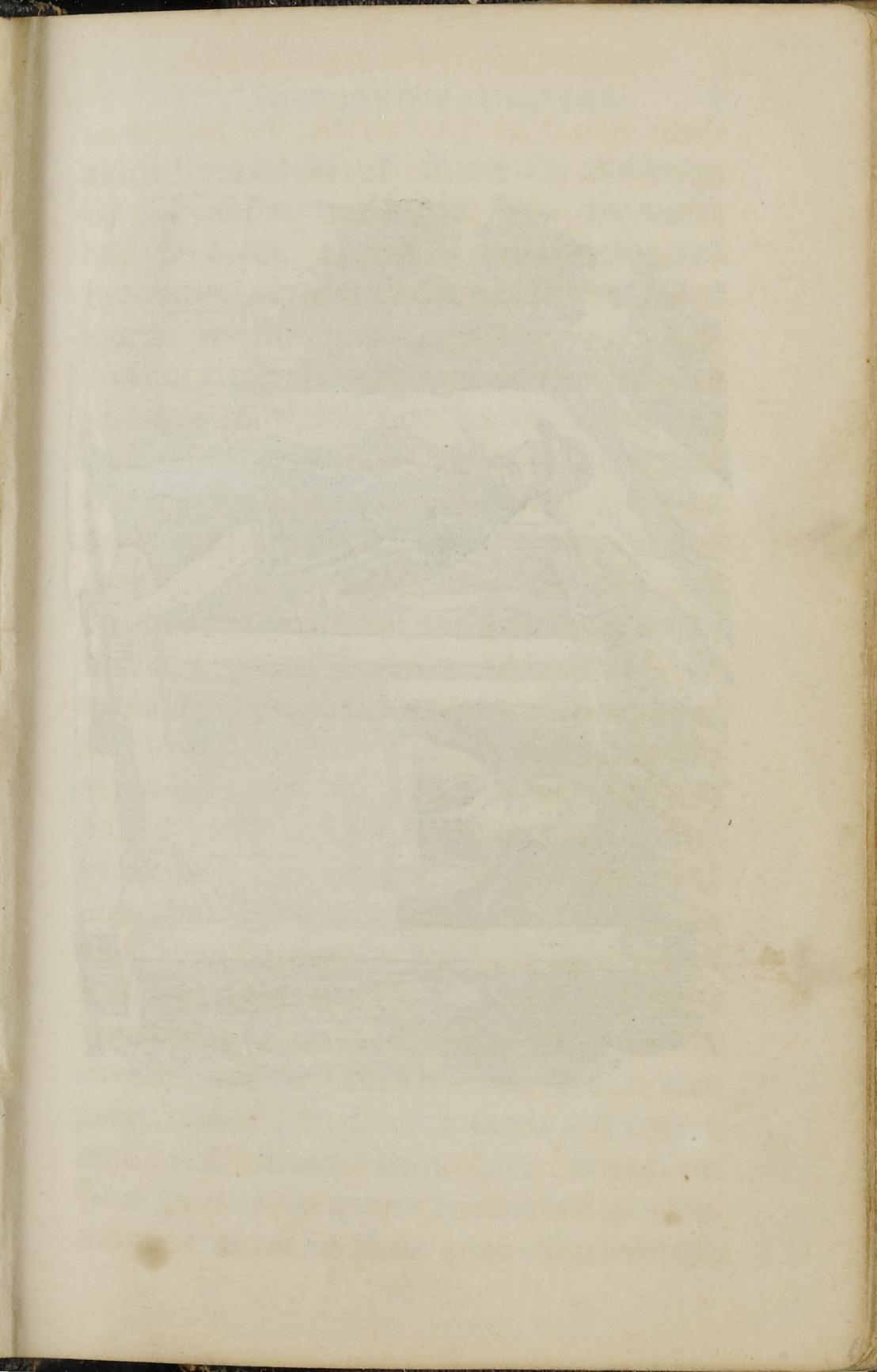
THE
IDOLIZED DAUGHTER.

MARY—had lived for many years in our family, and a more active, industrious, modest servant we never had. When she married one of our labourers, and settled in the most comfortable cottage on the estate, every one thought her a most enviable and happy woman ; and, as far as worldly concerns went, she was indeed prosperous. But, alas ! she had an idol reigning in her heart, which usurped the place that her God ought to have held there. She had only one daughter ; and as years rolled on, and no

other child was born, this daughter became doubly dear and precious to both her parents. Their fondness, however, was the fondness of Eli : no admonitions or reproofs were ever permitted to embitter the days of this beloved child. No employment or occupation was forced upon her at home, and every punishment at school for idleness and neglect, was looked upon as an injustice and affront. She grew up in bodily health and strength, but her mind was a wilderness, and her thoughts, for want of better employment, became a prey to vanity, which so easily finds its way into the female mind. No expense was spared by her fond parents to gratify her taste in dress ; they were well able to afford it, and she spent upon ribbons and gewgaws as much as she pleased. When she was about sixteen, my mother, lamenting the total idleness she lived in, took her into her service, and found that she had every thing to learn, and was not qualified for any one situation in a gentle-

man's family. For a year she bore with her indolence and forgetfulness, in hopes that she might improve, but at length, finding she required constant looking after, and was not to be trusted a moment alone, she dismissed her, recommending to her mother to place her in some farmer's family, where she would be kept at constant work. But her mother was but too glad to receive her beloved Nancy again ; she was the darling of her heart, she was never happy without her ; and, besides, she was looking forward with pride and pleasure, to her settling comfortably in the course of the following year. A very steady and excellent young man, who worked in our gardens, had been paying his addresses to her while she lived with us,—and a finer-looking and better-behaved youth I never saw. He continued to visit her at her father's house, and whatever he could spare of his wages from the support of his infirm father, he was prudently saving for Nancy. One day, when he had been kept later

than usual at his work, he rested at his father's house for a few minutes after supper, and then proceeded to visit his love. As he crossed the thick fir plantation, which separated the two cottages, the moon shone brightly through the dark boughs; the cool air of the evening, scented by the delicious perfume of the firs, and the agreeable prospect of spending the rest of the evening with Nancy, all contributed to refresh his weary limbs; and as he walked nimbly on, he roused many a timid hare from its resting-place, and many a fluttering bird from its perch in the thicket. But that rustling noise on his right hand,—what was that? He stopped to listen, and distinctly heard whispering voices; and one voice was that of a man, the other that of Nancy. He concluded her father was with her, and advanced to meet them; when to his amazement he beheld indeed Nancy, and by her side Mr. Edwards, a single man about thirty years of age, and the owner of a large farm in the





neighbourhood of Nancy's cottage. Oh! Nancy, can this be? thought he, and he passed them without speaking, and with his head bent to the ground; and, in hopes of not having been discovered, he returned another way to his father's house. "Alas! thought he, I must give up all hopes of Nancy; she will forsake me, and marry the rich farmer. But does he intend to marry her? A horrible thought then struck him, but he immediately dismissed it, and reproached himself for having for one moment thought so meanly of Nancy. The next day he found her at home, and gently remonstrated with her for her inconstancy; but Nancy tossed up her head; "She was free to do as she pleased; she had received handsome presents from her rich lover, but *he* had never given her any thing; the other was more like a gentleman than a farmer, and she liked him the best."— George was a good-tempered young man; but to be thus cast off at once,

and taunted with his poverty, by the girl for whom he was toiling to save a maintenance to enable them to marry, this was too much ; he bitterly reproached her for her levity and unkindness, and left her immediately. In the course of a few months he felt reason to rejoice that he had discontinued his visits, for the effects of Nancy's misconduct were daily becoming more apparent. His feelings at this discovery were those of anger and indignation ; but who can paint the anguish of her mother, when the sad truth flushed upon her mind ? From the day she became acquainted with her daughter's disgrace, she drooped and sickened ; at the end of a week she took to her bed, and she never rose from it again. I visited her in her chamber, and found her in a dreadful state of mind.— Her temper had never been under good control, and now broke out with dreadful violence, in bitter taunts and scornful upbraiding of her impenitent child. Find-

ing that my presence only agitated her, I talked of leaving her, but she would not hear of it. "Oh don't leave me," she said, "for I thought I was quite desolate till you came, but now I have found a friend. I had not a creature to speak to; my husband does not feel as I do about it; but oh! it is my own fault, and that is what cuts me to the heart. I never would contradict her, nor punish her; I never prayed to God for her; I loved her too dearly, but I did not love her in the right way; I forgot God, and made an idol of *her*; and now I am punished for my sinful neglect. Oh, my friend, you only know what I feel; you are my only comfort; do not leave me in this time of my distress."—"I will not leave you," said I, "till I can leave you in a more peaceful frame of mind; but do not say that no one but me knows what you feel. The God whom you have forgotten knows—he counts and treasures up your tears; and has sent you this

affliction to wean you from your earthly idol.—‘Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden,’ says he, ‘and I will give you rest. Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.’”—

“But,” said she, “will he receive me after I have neglected him so long?”—“Yes,” said I, “if you sincerely come to him in prayer, and strive to amend your life. Think of your sins; confess them to him; pray that the atoning blood of our Saviour may be accepted for them, and with all your might strive and pray against them during the remainder of your days. Talk calmly, not in anger or upbraiding, but mildly and seriously to your daughter; entreat her to go and sin no more; and to bring up the innocent offspring of her sin in piety and goodness.” The poor mourner already began to feel comfort from my words, but her mind still dwelt with remorse and shame upon the share she had in her daughter’s guilt.

“ Let that thought,” said I, “ deter you from upbraiding her; repent of the idolatry of your heart, and of loving the creature more than the Creator, and resign yourself calmly to his will.” I then knelt down by her side, and after reading the 39th Psalm, every word of which she heartily applied to her own case, and putting up a prayer for her, and with her, to the throne of grace, I left her for that time. A few days after, I asked a neighbour how she was? “ Oh, she is an altered woman,” said she. “ When I first saw her, she was almost out of her mind; she was ready to sink into the earth with shame and distress; she wished herself in her grave, without considering how unfit she was to die. But now she is quiet and resigned; her temper is almost heavenly, and she is praying, or giving good advice to her daughter almost all day.” This good account I was happy to find confirmed by my own observation. She had ceased to repine, and to

upbraid her daughter for her sin, and her husband for his want of feeling. Her words were now mild and gentle, and went to their hearts —she lingered about a month without any positive bodily illness; but her illness was of the mind; in two nights her hair turned grey, and she literally died of a broken heart; but I hope and trust the impression made upon her husband and daughter will be deep and lasting.

My friends! does my narrative touch your hearts? If so, search them diligently, and see whether you have no idol there? No God but the Lord? Is there no favourite relation or friend; no favourite plan, no wealth or honours, business or pleasures, that divert you from serving the Lord? If there is, let me implore you to cast down that idol from its shrine. “ If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is better for thee that one of thy members perish, than that thy whole body should be cast into

hell.—And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for Christ's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life." *Matt. xix. 29.*

TRUE ACCOUNT
OF THE
LIFE AND DEATH
OF
A YOUNG WOMAN.

THE simple, but short, and sad history of a young woman, which these pages record, is strictly true. The writer of it is the clergyman of the parish in which she lived and died. The names of the parties and of the place are not mentioned, for two reasons—first, because they would add little or nothing to the painful interest and the solemn instruction which the facts themselves seem calculated, under God's blessing, to excite, and to convey; and secondly,

because the writer does not wish to hurt the feelings of the living, or to blacken the memory of the dead, more than there is any occasion for. They are all known to Him, from whom nothing is hid.

The village of —, in the county of —, is situated about a mile from the great western turnpike-road. So low is its situation, that it is not visible from its principal approach, until you come to the bottom of a lane,



fenced on either side with wild apple trees. At the end of this simple avenue

rises the ornamented tower of the village church, around and close to which, as if for shelter and protection, a few poor-looking cottages raise their humbler roofs. “Surely here, if any where,” a stranger might exclaim, “calmness and peacefulness are to be found!” Alas, they cannot be, where there are not piety and goodness. Sinfulness abounds in degree, though not in extent, in the quiet-looking country village, as in the bustling city or town; for human nature is the same every where—as the sequel will too plainly show.

In one of the poorest of these poor dwellings, there lived an aged widow woman with her only child, a daughter, about twenty-six years of age. My attention was drawn to them, in consequence of their extreme state of poverty, immediately upon my entering on the discharge of my pastoral duties. I soon discovered that the daughter was living in an open state of sin with a young man, who did not belong

to the place. I represented, as was my duty, the exceeding sinfulness of



such a state of life. The mother appeared to feel very properly the justness and the force of my address —whilst the daughter was affected even to tears. “Surely,” thought I, “the rock cannot be very hardened as yet, on which an impression is so soon and so easily made!” They then informed me that the young man was very willing to marry her, but that they could not afford to raise the

necessary sum of money. I would here stop to notice a practice which there is too much reason to believe is more general than is commonly suspected. Many a young woman has been betrayed into an act of sin, under a promise of marriage. But even if that promise is fulfilled, which is not always the case, the sin remains the same! The names of the parties may be written in the parish register, but the sin is still registered in that book which shall be opened at the end of the world. They may lose nothing of their worldly reputation in the eyes of their neighbours, or they may regain what they have lost; but in the sight of God, who sees the *past* as well as the *present*, the blot is still visible—a blot which nothing can efface, but the precious blood of Him who died to save all believing and penitent sinners. How wrong then, how sinful is the expression, by which such a reparation, poor and unsatisfactory as it really is, is too often spoken of, viz. “making an honest woman of her!” It is true, if the

guilty parties enter into the married state from proper motives, from a desire to avoid further sin, and to make the only restitution that is in their power to society, which they have offended, it is not to be discouraged. Too seldom, however, do such motives influence such persons. Under this impression, I recommended that they should be married; and I removed the alleged difficulty respecting the fees. The young woman had no prayer-book; I gave her one, which she thankfully accepted, and spoke fair, and promised well for the future. Both the mother and the daughter now attended the church pretty regularly; but still, weeks and weeks passed on, and no banns were put in: at last the parties were duly asked. On my passing by the cottage one afternoon, I saw the young man and the mother and the daughter sitting together; and I thought it a fair opportunity to speak to him about his former state of life, as well as upon the prospect which was before him; and on in-

quiring when they thought of being married, he said, it would be delayed a little, from want of clothes. That this should not be an excuse, I gave him a suit, which is here mentioned, not by way of boasting, but solely to expose the deceit and ingratitude of this guilty couple. Three months passed away; so that their marriage could not now take place, unless the banns were again asked. However, I had done what I conceived to be my duty, by earnest exhortation, as well as by needful assistance. I therefore left them to follow their own course!

In a population of about six hundred, the deaths, and consequently the funerals, are not very frequent—not so frequent indeed as to be a familiar, and therefore an almost unnoticed, and quite unimproved, sight. Yet, strange to say, there was scarcely a funeral at which this sinful young woman was not present. Frequently have I seen her seated in the church, as I entered reading those awakening words, “We brought nothing into

this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” At times, I thought I perceived that she seemed to feel the impressive and affecting service for the dead. It is to be feared, however, judging from the result, that, whatever might have been the motive or cause which brought her within the hearing of those sounds, and within sight of the grave, she “had ears and heard not, she had eyes and saw not.” So true is it, that the ordinary means of grace, if they fail to soften, too frequently have the tendency of hardening a sinful heart. Alas! it requires a more startling peal than the sound of the knell to awaken the slumbering soul from its deep sleep—a louder voice than the silent language of an open grave to bid it “arise from a death of sin to a life of righteousness!”

It was during the last spring, that business of a melancholy nature took me away from my parish for a short time. On my return home, I was

informed that the young woman, whose short but sad history is now drawing to a close, was taken suddenly ill, and had expressed a desire to see me. I immediately went to her. Her mother informed me that she was seized, a few days ago, in the fields; and that she had taken to her bed only the very day before. I found her in a very feverish and restless state; but not, as far as I could judge, in immediate danger. I set her sin before her as plainly, but as feelingly, as I could, and the awful state in which she was. All that she answered was, that "she would do so no more!" Listen, ye who talk about, and trust to, a death-bed repentance, which you vainly flatter yourselves is to settle the awful account between you and your God—listen to the acts of confession, the rule of faith, the sighs of penitence—all, all wound up in this poor, unmeaning, unsatisfactory, and, we fear, unacceptable declaration, that "she would do so no more!" What may have been passing in her heart,

I presume not to judge. I only state faithfully what I saw and heard. “Oh ye, who have made no better preparation to meet your God and Saviour, tremble lest you should be in the same condemnation!”—After further exhortation and prayer, I left her. Upon calling the next morning, I found her perfectly insensible. Her end was visibly approaching. The time for exhortation was past:—there was yet time for prayer. And earnestly and humbly did I commend her soul into the hands of its most faithful Creator and most merciful Saviour! She died in the course of the night. Would that I could say that she departed, even outwardly, in peace! but fearful, (I am informed) most fearful were the expressions which fell from her dying lips! too fearful to be here repeated!—“He that being often reproved, and hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”

Prov. xxix. 1.

On the following sabbath, between the church services, the bell tolled

for the funeral of this poor young woman. Often as I hear that bell, its deep and solemn sound seemed to be more deep and solemn than usual. The sun was shining brightly upon her grave, from the mould of which a few village children were endeavouring with shrinking curiosity to look into it,—whilst here and there, groups of persons were scattered, who had assembled somewhat earlier to witness the last earthly ceremony in which mortality is to bear a part.

—A funeral any where, but especially a village funeral, although a solemn, is any thing but a revolting sight. Besides a due regard for the feelings of the living, there is almost a sort of consideration even for the unconscious remains of the departed, which are carefully concealed, as it were, from needless exposure, by the ample folds of the pall; whilst the long train of relations and connections who follow, banishes for a time the idea of that awful solitariness which attends the dead. But there were none of these attendant cir-

cumstances to cast a sort of hallowed feeling over the cold and dreary funeral of —. Four young men were seen to bear her slowly round the corner, the two foremost of whom were straining the corners of a scanty sheet which barely covered her coffin, and which served the purpose of a pall. Her aged mother followed, alone—and this formed the whole of the procession! And now commenced my sad and painful duty to read that truly affecting and beautiful service, which was evidently written in the spirit of the other church offices, and on the supposition that all, over whom it would be pronounced, were indeed children of God, and had died in the Lord. But by many, parts of that service have been misunderstood and misrepresented; particularly that part which is considered as expressing an opinion upon the spiritual and eternal state of the departed soul, “We commit *the body* to the ground in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life,” &c. &c.

Herein we only declare the fact of *the* resurrection, that the dead shall rise again ; we pronounce no opinion as to the final doom of the soul—we do not say that we have a sure and certain hope of the soul of the departed individual being raised to eternal life. Yet, in the spirit of that Christian charity which “hopeth all things,” we express indeed a hope concerning our departed brother or sister, that they may rest in the Lord ; but a mere hope is very different from a belief, or expectation, or assurance. I mention this, because this part of the burial service of the Church of England has been, and still is, very much misunderstood, and misrepresented. Doubtless, as in the present instance, it is the duty of the minister to offer up the same prayer of faith over one whom he had *scriptural* grounds for believing had died in the Lord, and over another whom he had the same grounds for believing had died in the most unprepared state of soul imaginable. And yet, he may, I

trust, utter the same prayer consistently over both; for, as it has been well observed, “there may be different degrees of hope, the lowest of which is but one remove from despair*.”

On the coffin being lowered into its last resting-place, a by-stander threw a flower into the grave—fit emblem, I thought, of her, who, at the youthful age of twenty-six, was thus “cut down, dried up, and withered.”

I endeavoured to improve the melancholy circumstance in my sermon, which soon followed the ceremony, the text of which was taken from 4th chap. 1 Ep. *Peter*, 18th ver. “And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

Such was the life, death, and burial of —. If her simple, but short, and I am sure, sad history, (to the faithfulness of which I again pledge myself,) should meet the eyes of any parent who has neglected to

* Wheatley on Common-prayer.

take what care is in their power, of the *souls* of their children, oh! let that parent take warning, lest the awful fate of this young woman should be that of any of his or her children! Let them consider how heavy a weight of responsibility lies upon their own souls!—And if any child should read this sad story, let that child ask himself, “If I were to die this night, in what state of soul should I die?”—May your life and your death be different from that of this poor young woman. Although she was brought up in a day-school and a Sunday school, yet she still had an “evil heart of unbelief.” I would mention, in conclusion, that, shortly after her funeral, I called upon the old school-mistress of the village, and asked her what sort of a girl — — — was, when she was at school? “Oh, Sir,” she replied, “we could do nothing with her—she was so wicked a girl, she used to tell the other girls that there was no such place as heaven and hell.”—Oh! could she now speak, she would

speak a very different language! She would say, “As you would go to Heaven, set out betimes in the morning of life, for it is a long and difficult way to get there—as you would avoid hell, flee from sin, for it is the short and easy way to it,—the end whereof is death, death to the body—death to the soul.”

THE FIRST GRIEF.



It was her first grief!—and to those who can understand the depth of a mother's feelings, nearly the bitterest that the heart can know. Lucy Arnott, the gay and laughing mother of two lovely girls, herself almost a girl in looks, and alas! a child in religious hope and experience, had, by one of those rapid diseases which seem to deride human skill, lost in one week both these treasures. I had heard from a neighbour of this

sad event, and though duty bade me hasten to the house of mourning, I went there with pain and reluctance, for I knew how inconsolable must be the sorrow of those who have not sought religion as “a guide,” before they needed it as a “comforter.” I crossed the stile that separates the garden from the lane, and opened the cottage-door as softly as I could ; for there is a feeling of respect which affliction excites in the mind, which prevents us from rudely intruding on it. What a scene of sorrow met my eye ! it seems still before me, though years have passed away since ! The mother,—her face pale with weeping,



and her hair and dress in disorder, was sobbing and wringing her hands,

in that agony of grief, which refuses to be comforted;—the father was sitting over against her, leaning his head on his hand, with such a look of angry and rebellious grief, as really shocked me; the aged grand-father, from his station in the chimney corner, was gazing on the scene around with a look of stupid wonder:—he seemed to have outlived his faculties, and his fixed, yet vacant gaze, seemed to show that joy and sorrow had alike taken leave of him for ever in this world; the poor dog who lay at his feet, seemed to have a greater measure of feeling than his master, and looked piteously around him; as I have sometimes noticed



in those sagacious animals. As I

opened the door, the wretched mother started from her seat, and sobbing out, “ My child, my child !” would have hastily left the room. I drew her back, and taking her hand in mine, I tried to show my sympathy in her sorrows, and listened, without trying to check her, while she poured forth the sad story of her loss. At length, however, she seemed wearied by the violence of her own emotions, and willing to listen to any attempts at consolation I could offer ; but, as I have said before, the task is difficult indeed, when the mourners have lived hitherto without God in the world. Oh ! would we but (as it is beautifully observed in one of Dr. Arnold’s sermons,) “ would we but present to our Maker the offering of a free and happy spirit ; ” would we but serve him as our master, and seek Him as our *friend*, before we need **Him** as our “ Comforter,” we should divest our trials of the sharpest sting, remorse : and the language of our hearts would no longer be, “ Art Thou come to call my sins to remembrance, and to slay

my son?" but it would be "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." The Bible is indeed full of comfort, and of precious promises; but it is a dangerous presumption in those who have neglected its threats and its warnings to take to themselves its consolations. I did not therefore speak to Mrs. Arnott as I should have done to one who had been leading a religious life, but I rather endeavoured to explain to her, that this severe affliction was in fact sent on an errand of mercy, to win her from the love of the creature to the love of the Creator. I will not repeat all that passed between us;—suffice it to say, that I left her with the pleasing hope that this trial would not be sent in vain,—for her heart, softened by sorrow, seemed at length to be touched by a sense of its past sins, and though her tears still flowed, they flowed not now merely for the loss of her children, but from a newly-awakened sense of her sinfulness and ingratitude. The husband, too, raised his head from

his hand, and though he spoke not, he seemed to listen to what I said.—



My two next visits were still more satisfactory ; I found Mrs. Arnott each time alone, for her husband had gone out to his usual work :— the occupations of the poor leave them no time to give way to sorrow ; and perhaps it is well that it is so ; for honest labour, “as unto the Lord, and not unto men,” brings with it its own consolation. I found Lucy looking ill indeed, and wretched, but seeming careless of the sickness of the body, and at length awakened to that fatal sickness of the soul under which she had so long laboured ;—her past life, in which at the time she had seen no harm, which she had thought quite

free from sin, now appeared to her, not indeed in its true colours, ("for the knowledge of sin is often gradual,") but in a very different point of view from that in which she had once seen it;—the fleeting and transitory nature of the present life too, seemed to open upon her, and the vast importance of that which comes after it. "But the light which first breaks in upon a soul that has been hitherto in spiritual darkness, is at first most painful;" and so Lucy found it:—"it is as if we had been walking at midnight in fancied security on the edge of a precipice; till the rising sun changes our carelessness into horror, by showing to us our real danger." "Oh! could I but find comfort," she would often exclaim, as remorse and sorrow filled her heart. "You will, Lucy," I replied, "if you seek it in the proper way, and by the proper means, of a thorough change of heart and life, through the grace of God's Holy Spirit, which is never withheld from those who seek it earnestly;—you will then feel that God is a God

of love,—now you know Him but as a God of terror;—but the work of grace may be gradual,—you must be content to tread the thorny paths of religion, before you can hope to gather the flowers which yet, as you advance, you will find thickly scattered around you—meanwhile pray and strive, that He who has begun a good work in you, may continue and perfect it.

Days passed on, during each of which I spent an hour with Lucy. She had always her Bible before her, which now seemed her delight; and she told me with gratitude that she had got her husband to join with her in prayer, morning and evening.

I was returning one Sunday evening from a walk which I had been taking, to enjoy the beauties of that delightful season when spring is just blending into summer:—a thousand sweet sights and sounds had kept me out later than usual, till the village clock struck nine as I entered the little church-yard which divided me from my home. It was almost dusk; yet,

as I walked on, the outline of a female figure caught my eye, seated beside



a new-made grave. I doubted whether I should advance; when, as I lingered, a faint sob broke on my ear, and the words, “My child, my child!” caught my attention.

It was Lucy’s voice;—the fond idolatry of sorrow had led her to the grave where her children had been buried, and she was strewing them with flowers which she had gathered from the fields. I came up to her, and taking her hand, urged her to return home with me. She did not speak,—she could not;—but she pressed her hand to her heart, as if to show that there was a void *there* which nothing could fill up.

It ill becomes us hastily to censure

the indulgence of a sorrow, which He who sends it deigns to look on with compassion :—I strove, therefore, rather to turn her feelings into another channel, and to prove to her that she had still an object of supreme affection ever present with her,—even Christ the Lord ; and that He who had taken from her her heart's treasures, had only done so, that He might fill the vacant place with His own image.

A week passed away, during which I was not able to see Lucy ; but the excellent minister of our parish went to her, and from him I knew that she received better counsel than I could have given her.

When I next called she was out ; she had taken her work and had gone to sit with a neighbour opposite, but came over as soon as she saw me. She looked better and more cheerful, and began directly speaking of the kindness of her neighbours, and how they had tried to help and to cheer her. She repeated, too, the advice and instruction which our good Cler-

gyman had given her, and expressed again and again her earnest desire to lead a new and holy life. On several other visits that I made to her, I always found her sitting with one of her neighbours (people who had, alas! little care for religion) at her needle-work. There was no harm certainly in sitting with a neighbour; yet it might lead to harm if it took up her thoughts and attention, and fixed them on this world instead of a better. I thought it therefore right to caution her. “ You must not think, Lucy,” I said, “ that I am insensible to the kind endeavours of your friends to comfort you, if I warn you against a mistaken kindness which our friends sometimes show us when they strive to drive away our sorrows by gossip and the idle tales of the world:— hopeless grief is not indeed to be indulged, but the religious thoughts to which, through God’s blessing, such grief may give rise, are ‘ that in the multitude of words there lacketh not sin,’ and commune with your own heart rather than with your neigh-

bours." I saw that Lucy received my advice coldly, but I trusted that this arose from a momentary feeling of anger, which would soon go off; but it was with real pain that I found, day after day, when I either called on her or passed her door, she was always sitting with one of her neighbours; and the "says he" and "says she," that I could not avoid hearing as I passed, told me plainly, that idle gossip was their theme. I saw this with concern indeed; for I now began to fear that she would realize that awful parable, St. Matthew, chapter xii. ver. 43. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, &c. &c. then goeth he and taketh seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first." The "unclean spirit" of carelessness and worldly-mindedness had indeed, for a time, been cast out by God's holy Spirit, blessing to this end the affliction she had suffered. "The house," that is, her soul, was for a while emptied of worldly thoughts

and wishes. Oh! can it be (I thought) that she will not strive to fill it with holy thoughts, and with “ all the fruits of the Spirit ? ” Can it be, that, already weary of seeking Him, “ in whose favour life is found,” she will turn again to the beggarly elements of the world ? If so indeed, the evil spirits that have been cast out will return with other spirits more wicked still, and her “ last state will be worse than her first.” I went to her and told her all this, and prayed her, as she valued her immortal soul, not to resist the Holy Spirit, lest haply he might depart from her for ever.

Time passed on ; summer gave place to autumn ; the promise of spring was fulfilling in the harvest



which was ready for the sickle;—“the flowers which had adorned the earth hath made way for the fruits which were to enrich it:”—every thing, in short, in Nature had advanced; but, alas! Lucy Arnott’s spiritual improvement had not kept pace with Nature, and she might have said in the words of the prophet, “the summer is past, the harvest is ended, but I am not saved.” I have seen her very often:—I usually, indeed,



when I called, found her sitting with one of her neighbours at work, but she always left them to come and sit with me; and would talk, much more indeed than she used to do, about the honour I did her in sitting in her poor place; yet I saw, or thought I

saw, that it was the honour (as she chose to term it) of my visits, rather than the profit, that, through the blessing of God, they might be of to her, which she now thought of. When I talked to her about her religious state, and reminded her of the good resolutions she had made in her time of affliction, she would listen with evident impatience, and often interrupt me to tell of neighbour such an one's daughter, who was going to be married, or of the birth or death of some one in the village, till I took my leave, hopeless of fixing her attention. All this was very sad. Yet, thanks to the infinite mercy of God, He does not let us fall away from Him, without many gracious recalls. He will not (if I may use the expression) take our first refusal of his offered mercies. Unlike any earthly friend, "often grieved, and often resisted, He returns to us in mercy, and will not utterly forsake us, till He has tried in vain every means to bring us to Himself."

Lucy's pious and excellent mother

came to pass a month with her, and she joined her good advice to the counsels of the Clergyman of our parish, but in vain ; Lucy listened at first with remorse, and shed tears, but this feeling soon changed into indifference ; and, on her mother's departure, she seemed to shun those who were likely to give her good advice, but was ever to be seen among the idle and the gay. The spark which God's spirit has lighted in the heart is not easily extinguished, yet, like all other flames, if unfanned, it will at length go out. So it proved in this instance. On my return home, after an absence of nearly a year, I asked after Lucy. I found her, as to worldly things, much better off ;—she went out daily to ironing, and got good wages ;—but alas ! in the great concern of religion she had indeed sadly gone back. She was never to be seen at Church ; but at fairs, and at all idle diversions, she was constantly to be met with, where the smartness of her dress and the levity of her conduct, prove the truth

of what has often been said, that we cannot remain as we are, but must either grow better, or we shall surely grow worse.

I often meet Lucy, gay and laughing, and seemingly contented ; but her's is that false and hollow peace “with which the devil tries to cheat those whom he has ruined :”—her thoughtless neighbours may call her happy, but those who think at all about eternity will reckon her far more miserable than when, sitting by the grave of her infants, her sobs broke upon the stillness of night, and she exclaimed in anguish, “my child; my child !”

THE END.

